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SPORTS

Winchester High girls soccer conquers Lexington, Watertown to remain among the top teams in the Middlesex League, statewide

JOE MCCONNELL | SPORTS EDITOR

October 17, 2025 . 1:07 PM — 4 min read

The Winchester High School girls soccer team poses with players from the Winchester Youth Soccer League before the start of the Lexington game on Oct. 3. The WHS players are, from left, goalie Amelia Burke, Courtney Fisher, Grace Wilhoite, GG Fantini, Lila Roeder and Amelia Holmes. It was the team's a Soccer Night at Knowlton. COURTESY PHOTO/ STEPHANIE MITCHELL

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The Winchester High School girls soccer team (10-2-1) has continued its impressive campaign into a new month with two more Middlesex League victories over Lexington (2-1, Oct. 3) and Watertown (7-0, Oct. 8). Between those two games, the Red & Black lost a hard-fought non-league contest to Wellesley (4-2, Oct. 5), last year's state champs, 4-2. After that stretch of games, they had a week off, before going to Burlington to edge the Red Devils, 2-1 on Oct. 15.

Taking into account the power rankings, the Winchester girls are seeded 11th in Division 1, while Wellesley (7-2-2) is the third seed. League rivals Belmont (9-2-1, seventh seed) and Lexington (10-3-1, ninth seed) are slightly ahead of them in the state standings with still five games left on the regular season schedule. There are 49 teams in this division statewide.

"We showcased grit, skill and chemistry during this challenging stretch on the schedule," said coach Michelle Ross.

Ross added that her team had the "confidence and resilience" to get through these early October games with just one loss.

The game against Lexington was also the team's annual Charity & Youth Soccer Night at Knowlton, as well as the first leg of the Krauss Cup.

It was a dominant performance by the home team as it controlled possession and dictated play throughout the match, while outshooting the Minutemen, 17–8.

The Red & Black wasted no time asserting themselves. In the seventh minute, junior Sophie Shapiro beat her mark on the end line to deliver a perfect cross to the back post, where senior captain Lilly Ossen half-volleyed home the first goal of the game.

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Just four minutes later, crisp ball movement led to what turned out to be the game-winning goal. Freshman Stella Garcia initiated it by intercepting a pass at midfield. Garcia then played it wide to classmate Ashley Mitchell, who then sent a one-touch pass to Shapiro, who squared it up to the top of the box, before it went to senior captain Juliet Semmes. Semmes ended up striking the crossbar, but the ball bounced to Shapiro, who alertly followed it up to bury the rebound home.

The home team continued to dominate, striking the crossbar twice more, not to mention the post three times. Lexington goalkeeper Mo Pym also came up with several outstanding saves, including a remarkable goal-line stop on a header by freshman Elise Alvares.

Lexington finally got on the scoreboard with just under three minutes to go in the game on a breakaway that eluded junior keeper Amelia Burke.

But, despite the late goal, Winchester's composure, creativity and teamwork defined the night, according to Ross, whose team was able to complete the season sweep against their longtime rivals. They shutout the Minutemen the first time around on Sept. 17, 1-0.

But this win was only half the story, because the team was also able to raise more than $2,500 for its three charities: The Kraus Family, Soccer Without Borders and Ted's Unicorns for Dana-Farber Pancreatic Cancer Research, which is simply another reflection of its commitment to giving back to the community.

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The second half of the Krauss Cup then took place at Concord-Carlisle High School against aforementioned Wellesley. It was a formidab challenge on the road against the defending state champs, whose

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high-pressure approach disrupted their rhythm early on, with three of the four goals coming from set pieces.

Wellesley opened up the scoring in the 35th minute with a well-placed header on a deep free kick. It then doubled the lead just before halftime on a corner kick.

“We need to be more disciplined defensively by avoiding unnecessary fouls in order to stay tight with our marks,” said Ross. “We were not outplayed or outmatched; we just simply lost our focus for brief moments, and strong opponents make you pay for it.”

Wellesley struck twice more early on in the second half, before the Red & Black responded with determination and energy. As a result of the inspired play, Shapiro connected on a stunning 30-yard free kick that sailed into the top left corner of the net.

A short time later, senior Courtney Fisher delivered a pinpoint cross to junior GG Fantini, who placed the ball perfectly off to Mitchell, where she clinically finished it off.

“It was truly a tale of two halves,” Ross said after the game. “Once our players regrouped and tightened their marking, the momentum shifted. Many teams would have given up, but ours showed heart, grit and unity. They also encouraged one another, while fighting until the end, and that’s what makes this group so unique.”

Returning home, Winchester used its matchup against Watertown to refocus and refine tactics. The home team was able to dominate in all facets of the game with sharp passes, disciplined defensive work and creative attacking play.

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Freshman winger Audrey Houllahan and Shapiro paced the offensive attack with two goals apiece against the Raiders. Senior captain Gaby Hermsdorf, junior midfielder Emma Kiernan and Garcia notched the other tallies.

“This victory not only reaffirmed our offensive prowess, but also provided valuable opportunities for player development and lineup experimentation as we prepare for the upcoming postseason,” said Ross.

The veteran Winchester coach went on to say that the team learned its lessons from the close loss to Wellesley, while gaining confidence in the wins over Lexington and Watertown.

After Wednesday’s win over Burlington, Liberty Division rival Arlington comes to Knowlton on Friday, Oct. 17, for a 4:15 p.m. game. The Winchester seniors will then be honored for their contributions to the program throughout the last four years on Tuesday, Oct. 21, before the start of the Woburn game. The clash between these two league rivals will begin at 6 p.m.

Joe McConnell is a longtime, award-winning sports editor for numerous North Shore publications. He began covering Winchester sports for the News last November.

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Winchester boys basketball heads to Bridgewater-Raynham for Sweet 16 game after beating Lexington in postseason opener

It was the third meeting this year between Middlesex League boys basketball rivals Lexington (16-5, 11th seed) and Winchester (17-4, 22nd seed). They split the first two during the regular season, thus making this Round of 32 postseason matchup the impromptu rubber game of this year's series, with the

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Winchester wrestling enjoys Top 10 finish at state divisional meet; senior captains move on to All-States

After the Winchester High qualified wrestlers competed hard over two days last weekend (Feb. 20, 21) in the State Division 1 Meet at North Andover High School, Mother Nature gave them a break to rest and recuperate with Monday's blizzard that resulted in two days off from school. There

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Winchester boys hockey advances to the Sweet 16 after beating Wachusett in the tournament opener

The Winchester High boys hockey team (12-9-2), the 17th seed, edged the 16th-seeded Wachusett Regional Mountaineers (18-2-1), 5-4 in a Round of 32 Division 1 state tournament game at Westborough's Northstar Ice Arena on Feb. 25. The Red & Black will now take on top seed Catholic Memorial (18-2-1)

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With postseason starting Friday night, WHS boys hoop seniors English, Sarpong, Burbine join Middlesex League elite

The Winchester High boys basketball team, the 22nd seed, will take on Middlesex League rival Lexington, the 11th seed, to begin the Division 1 state tournament in the Round of 32 on Friday night, Feb. 27, starting at 6 p.m. These teams are so evenly matched, beginning with the

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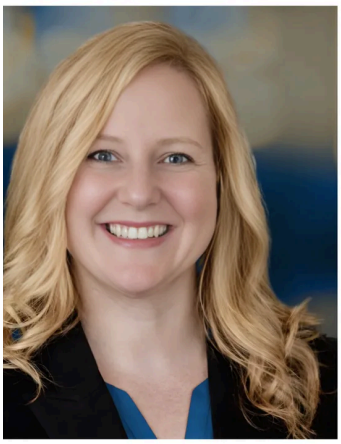

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in [illegible] iconic production is sure to [illegible] audience wanting more. Performances will

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EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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